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UNITBIB: a model for a new university library in Trondheim

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UNITBIB:

A MODEL FOR A NEW UNIVERSITY LIBRARY IN TRONDHEIM

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Introduction

The parliamentary decision of March 1995, introducing a new name and organization for the University of Trondheim, will hopefully end the 30-year dispute about influence and budgets between the parts of the university. While the College of Arts and Science, the Museum of Natural History and Archaeology, the Medical Faculty and the Norwegian Institute of Technology have been arguing, the library units of the university have had a peaceful existence with local administrations and policies. The services were adjusted to users with different needs and expectations, and daily communications were mostly restricted to ILL-activities.

In December 1993 the University Board decided that the library units should merge into one organization. This was intended to be a natural step in a process that everybody expected would end in a totally unified university in 1995.

A special committee was established to make an overall proposal to the University Board about the future library organization.

The process

The members of the committee were the directors of the three libraries, the chairmen of the library boards, and representatives from the university administration. Mrs. Randi Gjersvik, the director of the Technical University Library, was appointed

manager of the project. They decided to go through a careful process, strongly influenced by staff participation, in order to avoid, or reduce, culture conflicts. As a first step, 8 sub-committees were established representing the following areas of activity:

ACQUISITIONS . PUBLIC SERVICES . CATALOGUING/ CLASSIFICATION
. SPECIAL COLLECTIONS . INFORMATION RETRIEVAL/COMPUTER
SERVICES . COLLECTIONS; ORGANIZATION AND HANDLING . USER
EDUCATION . ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIVITIES.

These committees, each with a representative from the three libraries, first made a survey of the present situation. Then they came up with a proposal about the organization of their special area of activity inside UNITBIB. Throughout this process the committees were encouraged to work in close contact with colleagues at the library divisions.

Finally, the results from the work by the sub-committees were analysed and a recommended organizational plan for the merged library was delivered to the University Board nine months after the UNITBIB decision.

Throughout the process, three short seminars about the work status were arranged, one with an international expert on library mergers.

The UNITBIB-committee was supported by an organization expert from the Faculty of Economics and Industrial Management, the Norwegian Institute of Technology.

UNITBIB

(UNITBIB is a "project name" for the merging process and will probably not be the official name of the new library.) The philosophy behind the proposed UNITBIB organization is based on the following main principles:

Equal basic service level all over the university.

- Marketing orientation with focus on the needs of clients, secured by user interaction both for top administration and at the library units.
- A cost efficient organizational structure with few layers, and resource priorities to user services.
- Short communication and command lines between the libraries and internal divisions for support services.

Many of those who expected a hard fight between the library units about future principles were surprised about the agreement and positive working atmosphere in all committees. The chosen process with strong staff interaction turned out to be a success.

The work with library merging is so far based on an integration of the present university units. (Technology and Architecture, Medicine, Humanities and Social Sciences). The parliamentary decision of this spring, which resulted in a restructuring of the university in Trondheim from 1996, does not need to influence the proposed library model.

A special committee, appointed by the government, is going to make a definition of the disciplinary focus for this university later this year, and the final work on the library organization will await their decision.

Hopefully we will be able to present the first practical experience from the interesting process of merging the library units when we welcome the IATUL conference to Trondheim in 1997.